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COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Superintendent's Proposed Budget Presentation

Wednesday, February 18, 2026
6:00 PM
William J. Johnston Middle School Black Box Theatre

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Chair Stefanie Tracey-Calash, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Cody McNeely, Cari Duigou, Gussie Gilberti, Michelle Millington and Nancy Nelson

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Director of Pupil Services Eve Hurley, Assistant Director of Pupil Services Rebecca Tedesco, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Jennifer Martin, BA Assistant Principal Michael Mal, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Principal Meghan Amado, WJJMS Assistant Principal Bonnie McAneny, Jack Jackter Intermediate School (JJIS) Principal Stacy Ewings, JJIS Associate Principal Melissa Cyr, Colchester Elementary School (CES) Principal Judy O'Meara, CES Assistant Principal Kelly Bahre

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Butova and Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari, USI Insurance Broker Chris Monroe

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   - 1.1. Call to Order
     S.Tracey-Calash called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM
   - 1.2 Roll Call
     S.Tracey-Calash conducted roll call of the Board.
   - 1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

2. ***PRIORITY DISCUSSION / ACTION ITEMS**
   - 2.1. Budget Presentation: Superintendent's Proposed 2026-2027 Budget

Superintendent Sullivan and Assistant Superintendent Kuckel presented the proposed 2026-2027 budget, outlining the district's financial priorities, current challenges, and key drivers of cost increases. The presentation emphasized the district's continued commitment to maintaining strong academic programming and student supports while navigating significant budget pressures.

Superintendent Sullivan reviewed the major cost factors influencing the proposed budget, including contractual salary obligations, employee benefits, special education services, transportation, and general operating expenses.

A portion of the presentation focused on the district's health insurance program and the status of the

health reserve fund. Superintendent Sullivan shared that the district remains self-insured and continues to use Anthem as its health insurance provider. Recent claims experience has contributed to a decline in the health reserve balance, and the district is actively working toward rebuilding the fund to a healthy level.

The Superintendent reviewed trends in the reserve levels, why the reserve is so low, and the steps being taken to improve internal processes so that this does not happen again. The Board's Insurance Broker Chris Monroe from USI also gave a presentation on the health reserve, potential next steps and things to consider.

The Board received the proposed budget overview and discussed next steps in the budget development process, including upcoming budget workshops, opportunities for public input, and the timeline for continued deliberation and adoption.

Motion by: M.Millington
Motion to recess
Second: G.Gilberti
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

S.Tracey-Calash called for a recess at 7:51 PM.
S.Tracey-Calash called for a return from recess at 8:01 PM.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT**
   3.1. For Public Comment, please see Policy 1120 *Public Comment and Correspondence at Board Meetings*

- **Michael Dubreuil, Woodbine Road:** Mr. Dubreuil stated that at the February Joint Health Insurance Subcommittee meeting, concerns were raised regarding the projected depletion of the health reserve account by April or May 2026 and the need for an additional $1 million contribution from the Board of Education in the current fiscal year. Reference was made to Monroe's recommendation to restore the reserve over a two- three year period, with questions posed about whether replenishment should occur immediately or be phased in over time.

  He also included concerns about past practices related to employee benefits, including perceptions of limited transparency and insufficient review of benefit contracts under the previous Board.

  Additionally, Mr. Dubreuil stated that he was hearing rumors of a potential spending freeze, and interest was expressed in clarifying whether such a measure is being considered.

- **Kaelea Tewksbury, Felicia Baber Lane:** Ms. Tewksbury, a Special Education teacher at CES and a parent, spoke about the importance of literacy as a fundamental civil right and shared her commitment to a profession she values deeply despite the personal and professional challenges it brings. She expressed her love for the children and families she serves and stated that teachers are underpaid relative to their experience and the value they provide, describing this as a historical injustice.

  Ms. Tewksbury noted that she is facing an anticipated $10,000 pay reduction next year if the union vote is approved, with no realistic opportunity to recover that loss. She raised concerns that while teachers are being asked to make significant sacrifices, there would be no corresponding reduction in superintendent compensation or contributions to his 403(b).

She questioned why teachers are being asked to bear the greatest financial burden while district leadership experiences little to no impact, and stated that educators are being asked to sacrifice in response to errors they did not create.

- **Amanda Lenk, Crestview Drive:** Ms. Lenk, a teacher and parent, stated her deep concern about asking educators to accept a salary freeze while the overall budget continues to increase by approximately 10%, noting that such a freeze represents a significant financial setback for teachers. She also emphasized that a salary freeze does not impact teachers and administrators equally, and that the financial pressure facing staff stems from an error that could have been avoided. Ms. Lenk stated that those with the highest salaries were in positions of responsibility when the issue occurred, and urged the Board to reconsider the approach.

- **Olivia Duksa, Colchester:** Ms. Duksa stated her concerns regarding the proposed budget, specifically noting that it is heavy at the top. A major point of contention was the health reserve and the perceived failure to preserve maintenance over the years. She stated her strong disapproval regarding the teacher wage freeze. While she appreciated the administration taking no increase, the fact that teachers must take a deduction was criticized. The view was that everyone should share the hit. The teachers should not be the ones bearing the financial burden, suggesting instead that the elite should be. Ms. Duksa also felt the reserve was being managed incorrectly.

- **Karen Belding, Chair of the Board of Finance:** Ms. Belding stated that because of the uncertainty and questions around this year's budget proposal, she would work on the schedule if needed to support the Board's needs.

- **Molly Anderson, Norwich Avenue, via Zoom:** Ms. Anderson stated that concerns regarding discrepancies between the adopted budget and actual offer letters. Specifically, the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, HR Coordinator, and Executive Assistant to the Superintendent received raises higher than those adopted. There is skepticism that staff will accept the promised salary freezes.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by: N.Nelson
Motion to adjourn.
Second: C.Rivers
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

S.Tracey-Calash adjourned the meeting at 8:19 PM

Respectfully submitted,

AButova

Alyssa Butova
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent